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ABSTRACT

When Governors State University looked to television as a strategy for improving the efficiency of its instructional programs in 1982, a proposal was made to turn certain courses taught by professors semester after semester to large numbers of students into television courses that could be taken by students throughout the academic year. The "teleclass" concept--as opposed to elaborately produced "telecourses"--is based on the premise that a classroom can be a powerful educational environment, allowing students and professors to participate in a dynamic teaching-learning process. Entire classrooms can be taped as the instructor stimulates, provokes, and challenges his/her class, and the teleclass can to a large extent capture the humor and excitement resulting from this strategy. This concept also leaves professors more free time to develop follow-up courses where students can meet in smaller groups for more personalized instruction. Additional advantages include giving all students in a department a common database and providing distance education to serve those students who are unable to attend regular on-campus courses. Television production costs can be greatly reduced by having classes held in the television studio for taping. The only courses selected for teleclasses are those that have already been developed and run successfully in the classroom. The first teleclass, Business Law, was produced in the fall of 1982; current teleclasses generate 5% of the total student enrollment at the university. The teleclass concept can also be used in business and industry for training programs. (DJR)

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EXPANDING INSTRUCTIONAL TELEVISION

Presented by:

David Ainsworth
Governors State University

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David Ainsworth

Governors State University

Expanding Instructional Television

This paper describes a success story which occurred when Governors State University, a commuter-based upper division institution on the fringe of metropolitan Chicago, adopted a new approach to the use of instructional television. The new approach was the development and implementation of the "teleclass" concept. This approach can be used by other institutions of higher education or indeed by any large training organizations which are interested in improving instructional productivity.

Television has come a long way since the days of the 1950's when it was used mostly as a projection device to pipe a "talking face" to serried ranks of freshmen in large lecture halls. The "talking face" has been replaced by the "moving picture" as educational technologists have adopted a Hollywood -style approach to instructional television. Educational television crews have circled the globe to illustrate ideas and concepts expressed in the television script. Pressured by the standards of commercial television, the content of the educational television screen has evolved from earnest faces above bow-ties to highly

crafted, elegant programs rivalling the best of commercial documentary film-making. Rather than being a device to take care of overflow problems in the lecture hall, educational television has become a force in its own right. Entire courses, known as "telecourses", are delivered by broadcast and cable television to thousands of students in institutions of higher education across the country.

However, one consequence of this approach has been to cost the production of educational television out of the reach of the local campus television department. By the end of the 1970's educational television was produced by a small number of production houses, largely at the community college level.

This was the situation in 1982 when Governors State University looked to television as a strategy for improving the efficiency of its instructional programs. Instead of having professors teach certain courses semester after semester to large numbers of students, a proposal was made to turn these courses into television courses which could be taken by students throughout the academic year. This would involve minimal effort on the part of the professor who was then free to develop follow-up courses where the students could meet in smaller groups for more personalized instruction. Television would also have the advantage of giving all students in a department a common data-base, something that could not be guaranteed when different

professors taught different sections of the same course. Furthermore, by piping the television courses into the community via local cable channels, the university could serve students who were unable to attend regular on-campus courses.

One conventional telecourse was produced, with satisfactory results. However, its high development costs made the production of further telecourses unrealistic. Eventually, the search for a viable alternative to the telecourse led to the development of the "teleclass" concept. This concept was based on the premise that a classroom can be a powerful educational environment, allowing students and professors to participate in a dynamic teaching-learning process. What the teleclass proposers did was to invite certain professors and their classes down to the television studios so that this educational experience could be captured on tape and then made available to an external audience.

Television production costs were thus greatly reduced. The only courses selected for teleclass treatment were those that had already been developed and run successfully in the classroom. Thus the up-front course development costs were limited to adapting the courses for television rather than developing them fresh from scratch. As all production would take place in the tv studios there would be no extensive scripting, no expensive crew travel and transportation

charges, no hiring of expensive on-camera talent, and no time-consuming editing requirements.

This does not mean that teleclass courses are therefore necessarily dull. On the contrary, teleclasses offer an important instructional benefit which is not always available to those watching the pre-scripted telecourse. The classroom experience can be very involving, and a good professor can work with his/her students to provoke critical thinking, to get them to hold up their ideas to examination. A good teacher stimulates, provokes, and challenges his/her class, and the teleclass can to a large extent capture the humor and excitement resulting from this strategy. However, this type of experience is often precluded in the telecourse, where script committees generally avoid controversial or sensational material, even humor, thus feeding the student an accurate but rather bland academic diet that doesn't really get them involved.

From a production point of view, the teleclass designers developed some rules for the development of teleclasses. First, it was determined that although this would be a "talking face" approach, it was not to have the aspect of the "talking face" telelectures which plagued the early days of educational television. The highest possible production values were to be used, and the student audience was to be given equal prominence with the professor. This was felt to

be especially important so that the remote television viewer would be able to identify with and empathize with the student participants. It was also felt that students often have much to contribute to a class from their own experience. This is certainly true at a university such as Governors State University where the average age of the student population is 35 and where most students are already in the world of work and have their own fund of experiences to share. Thus the audience was made an integral part of the set, and great care was taken to light and mike the audience so that any and all interaction could be captured spontaneously. Blackboard notes were pre-fed into a character generator, which the in-studio students could copy from monitors in the classroom, and which were fed full screen onto the tape.

The first teleclass, "Business Law", was produced in the fall of 1982, with an audience of 35 students. Since that class was taped, eleven more teleclasses have been produced. Teleclass enrollments now equal enrollments in conventional telecourses and are responsible for generating 5% of the total student enrollment at the university.

The Instructional Communications Center, which produces the teleclasses, has expanded its staff and now produces six teleclasses per year. As the teleclass library grows, so each succeeding teleclass grows in production values and techniques. The main emphasis being developed is to

intensify the television experience for the benefit of both the studio audience and the viewing audience by rolling in more pre-filmed segments and by including on the set experts open to cross-examination by the student audience. Eventually, it is hoped that a hybrid television experience will emerge, combining the power of television to bring to the student a rich array of visual material otherwise unavailable in the classroom, and the documentary ability of television to capture the dynamic, spontaneous interchange between student and professor and between student and student.

The teleclass experience that we have gone through for the last five years has shown that it does represent an effective and acceptable alternative to both classroom instruction and conventional television instruction. Costs for producing this type of experience are within the means of most reasonably equipped university television facilities.

Nor does it seem that this technique need be confined to the academic world. It should work equally well in large industrial and military training departments faced with similar problems of maximizing the efficiency of training staff, giving all trainees a common data-base, and delivering instruction to people at remote sites.